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"A sinister cabal of superior writers."

Music DVD Review: Ravi Shankar - Tenth Decade in Concert: Live in Escondido

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Author: [Greg Barbrick](#) — Published: Jan 01, 2013 at 4:58 am

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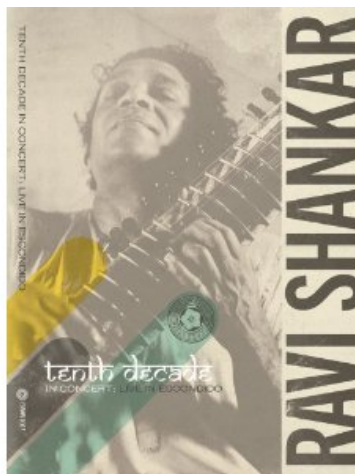
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The recent *Tenth Decade in Concert: Live in Escondido* DVD is a remarkable testament to just how strong Ravi Shankar's playing remained at the age of 91. The concert was filmed on October 11, 2011, and he passed on December 12, 2012, at the age of 92. The legendary sitar player seems ageless in this performance though. Even though the DVD was scheduled for release long before Shankar died, *Tenth Decade* now stands as more than just a concert film. It is a marvelous epitaph as well.



Shankar played ragas, which are a mode of Indian classical music that can be traced back some 1500 years. Through a convergence of cultural circumstances, his music became a huge influence in both jazz and rock in the 20th century. John Coltrane was so stricken, he paid tribute to Shankar by naming his son Ravi. And it is hard to imagine any of the jam bands existing without him leading the way, decades ago.

Joep Bor of the Rotterdam Conservatory of Music defines the raga as "a tonal framework for composition and improvisation." The improvisational aspect of the music is the key to what makes it so special. The instrumentation would differ, but the basic forms of Shankar's music provided a blueprint for what Coltrane, Miles Davis, The Grateful Dead, and many others would bring to their extended works later on.

The show opens with seven musicians walking onstage to rapturous applause at the California Center for the Arts in Escondido, California. Shankar is joined by Tommy Bose (tabla), Samir Chatterjee (tabla), Ravichandra Kulur (flute, kanjira), Parimal Sadaphal (sitar), Kenji Ota (tanpura, swarmandal), and Barry Phillips (tanpura) for this performance.

The set opens with "Yaman Kalyan," and "Khamaj." The two ragas account for over a third of the total performance, and provide a very impressive introduction. I watched *Tenth Decade* just a few days after Shankar's death, and I must admit that initially I did not have the highest expectations.

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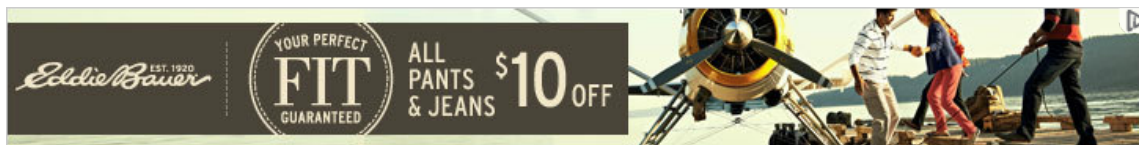
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After this full band extravaganza, we get two somewhat specialized pieces. The first presents an intimate drum circle, and is titled "Percussion." The second is "Goonga Sitar," which features flutes over a drone, to mesmerizing effect. I am not sure if these interludes were included to offer Shankar a little rest, or to add some musical variety to the program. More than likely, it was a bit of both. In any case, I think they are valid, and completely disagree with those who complain that the segments are a waste of time.

"Ragamala" closes the evening out, and is another full band performance, with Shankar again displaying his incredible skill as a musician. The piece is a wonderful showcase for each member of the group, as it features multiple crescendos, and opportunities for all to showcase their talents. Watching the 91-year old Shankar get into these jams is phenomenal. It just shows that almost up to the very end, he still had it.

Tenth Decade was filmed by Alan Kozlowski, who had a long history with Shankar. Prior to this, he directed two documentaries about him, and had even performed (playing tanpura) onstage with him. The concert is presented in a very straight-forward style, without any jump cuts, very few audience shots, or other distractions. The music is the star, just as it should be.

Kozlowski penned a few notes for the DVD release in September, 2012. Nobody knew that Shankar's death was just around the corner, but Kozlowski's words work in context of both the concert at hand, and of Shankar's life. "My goal is to capture the magic and share it as a talisman that might inspire others on their path," he writes, "[and] to see Ravi's eyes light up as he surrenders to, and immerses himself in each musical moment [that] provides a window into a timeless place made possible by a lifetime of discipline and dedication to his craft."

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Greg Barbrick is a Seattle native who was first published in 1988, in his hometown music magazine, The Rocket. Since then his work has appeared in print and online for numerous



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